

PROGRESS IN VENEREAL DISEASE
CONTROL IN THE UNITED STATES
DURING FISCAL YEAR 1939

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VENEREAL DISEASE control activities in the United States increased markedly during the period from July 1, 1938 to June 30, 1939. The LaFollette-Bulwinkle Bill (Venereal Disease Control Act of May 24, 1938) provided the basic funds as well as the additional stimulus for a venereal disease control campaign in which the U. S. Public Health Service cooperated with State and local health authorities. Under the provisions of the Act, the sum of \$3,000,000 was made available for the first year of the program. Of this amount, the sum of \$2,400,000 was allotted by the U. S. Public Health Service to the health departments of the States and Territories. Under the matching requirements laid down by the Surgeon General, State and local funds to the amount of approximately \$4,300,000 were used to supplement the Federal allotment for venereal disease control.

The progress achieved through the expenditure of these funds is plainly demonstrable in the rapid extension of treatment facilities, of laboratory services, of research and training programs, as well as in the rise of popular response to and interest in the venereal disease control program.

During the fiscal year 1939, the number of clinics for the treatment of venereal diseases increased over 30 percent. By June 30, 1939, the number of clinics as reported to the U. S. Public Health Service stood at 2,405 ; while the number reported on July 1, 1938 was 1,746. With the exception of three, every State and Territory in the Union maintains or gives aid to clinics in

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which venereal disease patients may obtain free or part-pay treatment. In one of these areas, laboratory services and an educational program are administered by the State while the actual treatment services are provided by the county governments. In another, while no clinic facilities are available, the health department provides free drugs to private physicians for the treatment of all patients. In the third, initial steps have been taken to establish satisfactory therapeutic services for the control of the venereal diseases.

An encouraging indication of progress, which emphasizes the increasing spirit of cooperation between organized treatment centers and State health authorities, may be observed from the fact that over 90 percent of the venereal disease clinics were providing monthly activity reports to State health officers by the close of the fiscal year 1939, whereas during the preceding year only 60 percent of the clinics in existence at that time cooperated in such a manner.

In order to determine the nature and extent of the venereal disease problem, as well as to measure the progress of venereal disease control activities, adequate statistical reporting is necessary. The most striking indication of progress in this respect is the fact that during the fiscal year 1939, the U. S. Public Health Service aided State departments of health in installing central tabulating systems for the reporting of venereal disease activities in areas including 500 clinics serving a population of 38,000,000. As the result of this program, a mass of data concerning venereal disease morbidity is being acquired rapidly.

The number of persons with venereal disease brought under treatment for the first time in organized clinics throughout the United States increased from 197,000 in 1938 to 315,000 in 1939. The number of treatments administered in clinics increased from 5,200,000 in 1938 to 8,000,000 in 1939; and the number of patients discharged from clinics as arrested or cured rose from 78,000 in 1938 to 103,000 in 1939. During the fiscal year 1939, approximately 2,300,000 laboratory tests for diagnostic and control purposes were performed by or for clinics; and 3,200,000 doses of arsenical drugs were administered to clinic patients. These data are merely partial indexes that treatment and laboratory facilities and services

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increased between 30 and 85 percent during the fiscal year 1939 (table 1).

TABLE 1.—*Comparison of venereal disease clinic activities in the United States—fiscal years 1938 and 1939*

	Fiscal year 1938.	Fiscal year 1939.	Percent. increase during 1939.
1. Number of venereal disease clinics reported as functioning during fiscal year	1,746	2,405	37.7
2. Number of venereal disease clinics reporting activities to State and Territorial health departments.....	1,122	2,085	85.8
3. Number of venereal disease patients brought under treatment for first time in clinics ¹	197,303	314,594	59.4
4. Number of treatments administered in venereal disease clinics ¹	5,177,827	7,923,958	53.0
5. Number of doses of arsenical drugs administered in venereal disease clinics ¹	1,854,735	3,166,342	70.7
6. Number of patients discharged from venereal disease clinics as arrested or cured ¹	78,042	102,880	31.8
7. Number of laboratory tests performed by or for venereal disease clinics ¹	1,323,177	2,350,695	77.7

¹ Activities reported to State health departments by cooperating clinics.

Study of the activities of the State and Territorial health departments indicates that the number of tests for syphilis and gonorrhea performed in State-owned or controlled laboratories rose from 4,000,000 in 1938 to 6,000,000 in 1939. Free arsenical drugs distributed to private physicians and clinics increased from 2,800,000 doses in 1938 to 4,700,000 doses in 1939. With the recognition of the newer chemotherapy in the treatment of gonorrhea, State and Territorial health departments reported the free distribution of 3½ million 5-grain sulfanilamide tablets during the fiscal year 1939. Free drugs for the treatment of persons with venereal diseases are provided in every State and Territory. In 26 States and Territories, free drugs are provided to all persons regardless of economic status (compare with 14 States providing such service in 1938); while in the remaining States and Territories, such drugs are provided only to indigent, semi-indigent, or other special cases (table 2).

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TABLE 2.—*Comparison of activities of State and Territorial health departments—fiscal years 1938 and 1939*

	Fiscal year 1938.	Fiscal year 1939.	Percent. increase during 1939.
1. Number of States and Territories employing venereal disease control officers			
(a) full-time.....	34	52	52.9
(b) part-time	29	32
	5	20
2. Number of State and Territorial health departments with separate divisions or sections of venereal disease control	27	53	96.3
3. Number of States and Territories distributing free drugs.....	47	53	12.8
(a) regardless of economic status.....	14	26
(b) to indigent or special cases only.....	33	27
4. Number of doses of arsenical drugs distributed free by State or Territorial health departments.....	2,799,110	4,677,757	67.1
5. Number of tests performed by State laboratories.....	4,462,684	6,209,705	39.1

By the close of the fiscal year 1939 each State in the Union (including the Territories and the District of Columbia) had established a separate bureau, or subdivision of an already existing bureau, for the control of venereal diseases ; while during 1938, such divisions or sections existed in but 27 of the 53 areas. In 1938, full-time venereal disease control officers were employed in 29 States, and part-time officers were employed in 5 States ; but in 1939, 31 States (and Puerto Rico) employed full-time control officers, and 17 States, Alaska, Hawaii and the District of Columbia, employed part-time officers. Every State in the Union now employs at its own expense, or through county health departments, case-finding and case-holding workers.

Progress in prenatal and premarital detection of syphilis has been achieved. Nineteen States now require examinations including serologic tests for syphilis of all applicants for marriage licenses, and 15 States require physicians to perform blood tests for syphilis on expectant mothers.

Educational activities among laymen and physicians have expanded. The radio and press have responded generously in their support of the venereal disease control program. Popular response has caused industry, labor, church, and school to formulate programs dealing with

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the social aspects of venereal disease control. Postgraduate training centers in venereal disease control for physicians and nurses have been expanded with the support of the United States Public Health Service. During the fiscal year 1939, financial assistance was provided to postgraduate training centers located in nine of the leading universities.

Research activities dealing with the various aspects of venereal diseases were continued during 1939. Numerous investigations, undertaken by the United States Public Health Service in cooperation with outstanding medical groups, were begun or continued during the period. Of special merit are a series of research-demonstration projects organized during the fiscal year in cooperation with State and local health departments. These projects, covering rural as well as urban areas, have been designed to demonstrate various methods of venereal disease control and treatment under a wide variety of conditions.

Although great progress has been achieved in the field of venereal disease control, much additional work over a long period of time is essential. In recognition of this, the Congress, in accordance with the authorization contained in the Venereal Disease Control Act of 1938, appropriated the sum of \$5,000,000 for the prosecution of the program during the fiscal year 1940.